

STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Step 1: Assess your current stressors and explore the ways that you respond to them.

- Generate a list of current changes in your life. Remember that any change, whether positive or negative, causes stress.
- Brainstorm the ways you cope with stress. Ask yourself if they are healthy or unhealthy ways?
- Be aware of your physiological and emotional reaction to stress. For example, you could keep a mood diary.

Step 2: After identifying stressors and coping styles, you can begin to modify your behavior. The following is a list of stress management strategies.

1. Avoid Unnecessary Stress

- Learn to say "NO": know your limits and stick to them.
- Avoid people who stress you out: limit the amount of time you spend with someone who consistently causes stress in your life.
- Take control of your environment: if the news makes you anxious, turn off the tv; if traffic is an issue, carpool or ride a bus.
- Avoid hot-button topics: give yourself permission to not engage in conversations that upset you.
- Pare down your to-do list: analyze your daily tasks; distinguish between the "should" and the "musts." Whenever possible, eliminate the "shoulds."

2. Alter the Situation

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up: communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way.
- Be willing to compromise: be willing to bend or change a little to find some middle ground.
- Be more assertive: don't take a backseat in your own life, take control of it.
- Manage your time better: Use a twelve month planner to organize things that need to be done daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. Set realistic goals, plan ahead, break large demands into small, manageable parts.

3. Accept the things you can't change

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable: recognize what you can change about yourself or your situation. Accept what is beyond your control – for instance behavior of others.
 - Look for the upside in situations: as the saying goes, "what doesn't kill us makes us stronger."
 - Share your feelings: talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a counselor.
 - Learn to forgive: accept that people are fallible (including you), and learn to let go of your anger and resentments.
4. Adapt to Stressor
- Reframe problems: examine your thoughts about the situation that is causing you stress, and if it is based on distorted thinking, change it to more positive and realistic thinking.
 - Look at the big picture: ask yourself, "is this really all that important in the bigger scheme of things."
 - Adjust your standards: perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection.
 - Focus on the positive: make it a daily routine to look at all the positives in yourself, others and your life.
5. Nurture Yourself
- Set aside relaxation time: practice deep breathing daily; it is the quickest way to turn off the Stress Response and turn on the Relaxation Response.
 - Connect with others: spend time with positive people who support you. Develop a support network to rely on in times of need.
 - Do something you enjoy every day: Make time for things that bring you joy on a daily basis.
 - Keep your sense of humor: the act of laughing helps your body fight stress. Learn to laugh at yourself.
6. Adopt a healthy lifestyle
- Exercise regularly: aerobic exercise can reduce anxiety up to 50%. Start small, it is ok!
 - Eat a healthy diet: good nutrition (a balanced diet) will improve your ability to appropriately respond to stress.

- Reduce your caffeine and sugar: the temporary “highs” they provide often end with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the intake of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks, you’ll feel more relaxed and you’ll sleep better.
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs: the relief from these substances is only temporary. Come up with healthier ways to deal with life’s problems.
- Get enough sleep: feeling tired will increase your stress; adequate sleep fuels your mind and body.

And Remember to **BE KIND TO YOURSELF!**

Source: www.helpguide.org and The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook.